Extended Columbia/Snake River River Closures: Lessons learned and planning for the future

USACE Joint Nav Meeting
May 27, 2015
Boardman, OR
Highest lift locks in United States

Taking a peek at Little Goose Lock & Dam
Major maintenance activities were well planned

- Collaborative planning since 2006:
  - USACE – Portland District
  - USACE – Walla Walla District
  - PNWA

- 2007: Identified Columbia and Snake River maintenance and repair needs; drafted timeline

- 2009: American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA – “stimulus”) package provided ability to move forward with plans

**Goal:** minimize planned and unplanned system closures
Columbia Snake River Locks Major Repairs – 2010/11

- Significant federal investment
- New gates at 3 locks, major repairs at 3 others in one closure
- Ensures long term viability of the river system
- Avoid emergency, one year closure from catastrophic failure
Challenge: Prepare Regional & Overseas Stakeholders

- Growers & manufacturers
- Shippers
- Ports (inland and deep draft)
- Towboaters, steamship operators, pilots
- International grain customers
- Fuel companies
- Municipalities that ship solid waste
- Media
- Government entities (federal/state/local)
14-month Communications Effort

- Over 30 speaking engagements with growers, shippers, ports, and government entities
- PNWA Nor’westers and fact sheets
- Media outlets – over 24 news stories
- Monthly USACE teleconferences
- Weekly USACE website updates prior/during closure
- USACE tours of projects
- U.S. Wheat Associates/PNWA brochure for overseas buyers
Economic Impacts - Labor

- Historic, unique closure = lack of federal assistance for displaced towing industry employees
- Towing companies temporarily laid off 35-67% of employees
- Job sharing, reduced hours offered to some employees
- Benefits packages retained for all employees
- Goal: retain highly trained workforce

Sources: Freight Policy Transportation Institute “Return to the River: Columbia-Snake River Extended Lock Outage”, Tidewater Barge Lines, Shaver Transportation
Economic Impacts - Wheat

Growers had three choices:

- Sell early
- Ship via truck/rail to export facilities during closure
- Increase ground storage; sell after river system reopens
Economic Impacts - Wheat

- Growers chose the river system
- Wheat volumes before & after the closure increased sharply over historical averages:

**BEFORE CLOSURE**
- September 2010 – 65% increase
- October 2010 – 20% increase
- November 2010 – 27% increase

**AFTER CLOSURE**
- April 2011 – 118% increase
- May 2011 – 84% increase
- June 2011 – 88% increase

*Source: Freight Policy Transportation Institute “Return to the River: Columbia-Snake River Extended Lock Outage”*
Economic Impacts – Solid Waste and Petroleum

Containerized municipal solid waste & petroleum moved upriver by truck and rail at increased cost

Source: Freight Policy Transportation Institute “Return to the River: Columbia-Snake River Extended Lock Outage”
Economic Impacts - Containers

- Port of Portland - Shipper Support Program (SSP)
- Stipend for impacted container-on-barge shippers
- Shippers sent containers via truck or rail during closure
- Port retained all container trade customers during closure

Source: Port of Portland
Economic Impacts – Other Products

- Stakeholders with flexibility and/or storage options shipped before & after the closure
- Above-average shipping before/after closure:
  - Wheat
  - Vegetable products & processed grains
  - Forest products
  - Iron ore
  - Diesel fuel
  - Fertilizer

Source: Freight Policy Transportation Institute “Return to the River: Columbia-Snake River Extended Lock Outage”
Economic Impacts – Shipping Rates

- For commodities that moved via truck and/or rail, transportation costs increased 37.4%
- Truck & rail firms increased rates during the lock closure to capitalize on the lack of barge transportation

Source: Freight Policy Transportation Institute “Return to the River: Columbia-Snake River Extended Lock Outage”
Long term planning for inland system repairs

- Corps & PNWA – working together
- Continues collaboration that led to success with ARRA funds

Strategy:
- Identify future major maintenance needs
- Predict and plan for system closures years in advance
- Provide funding vision for Corps HQ and Congress

GOAL IS UNCHANGED:
Minimize planned and emergency closures
We anticipate continued success!

First lockage at LoMo

First lockage at The Dalles
Opportunities to Stay Informed

Website:
www.pnwa.net

Nor’wester newsletter

Kristin Meira
Executive Director
kristin.meira@pnwa.net